Retro on Retro: “Scream” 1996

A Halloween classic, the original "Scream" has had a lasting impact on the horror movie genre.

Wes Craven’s 1996 slasher film *Scream* is one of my favourite movies to watch around Halloween. I love curling up in bed in the dark, with a bowl of popcorn, and watching the iconic first scene with the infamous question: “What’s your favourite scary movie?”

Scream was a huge turning point in the genre of horror, as it changed the trajectory of horror and slasher movies for the next decade. There were continuous sequels in 1997, 2000, and 2011. The franchise has since released two requals, in 2022 and 2023. Requals are films that reboot a franchise but still follow the same timelines. Or, in the case of many horror slasher films, they follow multiple timelines.

There are a few reasons why *Scream* is so successful in keeping its staying power. Importantly, the opening scene in the first film had a great impact on the audience as it diverted expectations.

Drew Berrymore, who starred as Casey Becker, became heavily involved in promoting the film before its release. As the daughter of famous actors, John Drew Barrymore and Jaid Barrymore, people expected her to make a big name for herself in the film industry. It was clear that she was going to be *Scream's* final girl, the last girl alive in a horror movie. However, if you’ve seen the film, you know that this wasn’t the case.

Scream’s cold open begins with Casey answering the phone, resulting in an iconic phone call and chase scene that ends in her and her boyfriend’s death. This was shocking to audiences. Who was going to be their final girl if not Barrymore?

In fact, originally Barrymore was the final girl, Sidney Prescott (Neve Campbell). However, Barrymore wanted to change the overused horror trope of the final girl being an embodiment of the American sweetheart. She and Craven wanted to “take that comfort zone away.”

"In the horror film genre, my biggest pet peeve was that I always knew the main character was going to be slugging through at the end, but was going to creak by and make it," Barrymore said.

This diversion of expectations would be the case for all of the following *Scream* films. Over the next two decades, audiences have remembered these iconic plot twists the Scream franchise is known for.

Another contributor to the franchises' lasting impact is the reveal of the “whodunnit” question. It was a shock to audiences, until it became common knowledge.

The twist is that best friends Billy Loomis (Skeet Ulrich) and Stu Macher (Matthew Lillard) didn't only murder students around Woodsboro High School. They also murdered Sidneys' mother a year prior to when the film takes place. This was shocking to audiences because we were led to believe that there was only one killer. Not many horror movies before *Scream* had two killers. Even less had crimes that occurred before the film even began. The twist had such a great impact, that many who haven't even seen the film know about it.

Another major reason for the franchise's success is the strong relationships between the cast, crew, and director. These relationships led to consistent characters and storylines for audiences to grow attached to.

The actors of Dewey Riley (David Arquette), Gale Weathers (Courteney Cox), and Sidney Prescott, return multiple times throughout the franchise after appearing in the original *Scream*. Even the requels had most of the original cast. This allowed for beautiful connections throughout the creation of these films. The three became friends, and Arquette and Cox eventually married in 1999. Although they divorced in 2012, they are still close friends and co-parents to their daughter.

The horror genre was dying by the mid-nineties with cheap slasher movies and overused tropes. Craven's cast and crew, however, changed the game. They defied the norms, while redefining horror to what it should truly be about: the relationship between the filmmakers and their audience that has audience members wanting more.